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COMMON BIRDS

OF THE

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COAST

WILLETT

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COMMON BIRDS

of the

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COAST

by
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COMMON BIRDS OF THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY COAST

This is the first of a series of Los Angeles County Museum publications dealing with the birds of this county. It lists the species that are common to and typical of our coastal area, and includes condensed descriptions, differentiating characters and some illustrations. It is hoped that, by means of the information given here, the field observer may be able to identify the different species that are typical of the area under discussion.

The classification used is that of the 1931 Check-List of the American Ornithologists' Union, excepting that the families are in a slightly different sequence, this change having been made in order to group together certain families of superficially similar characteristics and similar habitats. In order that the following subject matter may not be too technical for junior grade students, scientific terms have been reduced to simple English. It has been considered advisable, however, to retain the scientific names of families, genera and species, which are coupled with the English names of the same.

Measurements used are: Length, from tip of bill to end of tail; wing-spread, from tip to tip of out-stretched wings, and bill, from feathers of forehead to tip, measused along the upper mandible.

Mounted specimens of all the species listed here are on exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum, and it is suggested that students make free use of these exhibits to settle problems of identification.

There are many species, particularly among the smaller land birds, whose wide lowland distribution includes the coastal district. Such, for the most part, are not listed here, but will be dealt with in another publication.

COMMON LOON (28-36 inches) (Winter)

DIVING BIRDS

Heavy-bodied; feet far back; wings comparatively small; wing-beats rapid. Obtain food by diving; able to remain under water for considerable periods. (Loons and Grebes.)

LOONS (Family *Gaviidae*)

Large; comparatively thick-necked; bill pointed; feet webbed; breast and belly white. Common on ocean and in bays during spring, fall and winter; non-breeding birds occasional in summer. Three species, as follows:

1. COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*). Largest of our Loons (length 28-36 in.), with heaviest bill. Summer adults with black head and neck and white collar. In winter dark gray on head and back, white below.

2. PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*). Smaller (length 24-26 in.), with much smaller bill. *Top of head and hind-neck smoky gray*; throat black in summer, white in winter. Bill straight.

3. RED-THROATED LOON (*Gavia stellata*). About the same size as last species; *bill slightly upturned*, most noticeable in lower mandible. Throat red in summer; *back spotted with white in winter.*

HORNED GREBE (12-15 inches) (Winter)

GREBES (Family *Colymbidae*)

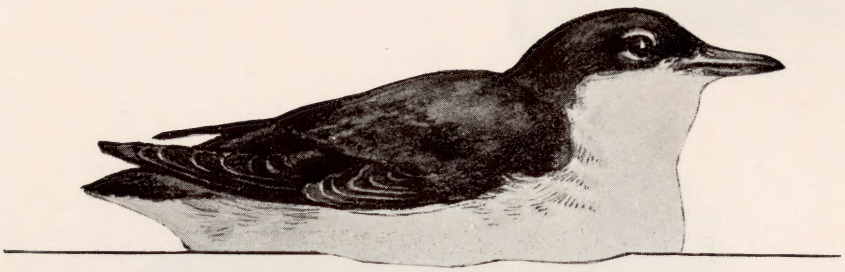
Often called "hell-divers." Smaller than loons; neck slender; bill pointed; feet lobed; tail wanting; lower parts silvery white. Three species are regular winter visitants along shore, and a fourth occasionally straggles to the coast.

4. WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*). *Largest* of the grebes (length 20-28 in.), with *long slender neck* and sharp bill. Dark brownish gray above, silvery white below.

5. HORNED GREBE (*Colymbus auritus*). Smaller (length 12-15 in.). In summer has crests on side of head, but *none in the center*; in winter, crestless, with *white on throat and cheeks extending upward to the eye.*

6. EARED GREBE (*Colymbus nigricollis californicus*). Size as in last species. In summer has dark *central crest* and silvery side crests; crestless in winter, with *definite dark area below the eye.*

7. PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*). About the same size as the last two, but head never crested, and *bill much thicker with black band around middle.* Occasional visitant from fresh water.



XANTUS' MURRELET (10 inches)

AUKLETS AND MURRELETS (Family *Alcidae*)

Small, salt-water, diving birds with very short neck, pointed bill and well-developed tail. Float high on water. In flight, wing-beats very fast. Usually seen singly or in pairs. Migrants and winter visitants.

8. XANTUS' MURRELET (*Brachyramphus hypoleucus*). About 10 inches long. Dark gray above, silvery white below. Distinguished from the next two species by *entirely white throat.*

9. CASSIN'S AUKLET (*Ptychoramphus aleuticus*). A short, stubby, neckless, little bird (9 inches long). Differs from the last in much shorter bill, *dusky throat*, and *small, white spot on upper eye-lid.*

10. RHINOCEROS AUKLET (*Cerorhinca monocerata*). Much *larger* than the last species (15 inches long), with longer bill and darker upper parts, but similar dusky throat and white belly. In spring and summer has horn on bill, and narrow, white plumes running backwards from each side of mouth.

PELICANS (Family *Pelecanidae*)

Very large birds, with long bill from near the end of which a pouch extends to the throat. Flight alternately soaring and flapping.

11. CALIFORNIA BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis californicus*). Color mostly brown; adults with white neck and yellowish crown.

FARALLON CORMORANT (30-36 inches)

12. WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*). White, with black wing-tips and yellow bill and feet. A bird of interior waters, seldom coming to the coast.

CORMORANTS (Family *Phalacrocoracidae*)

Commonly known as "shags." Large (length 25-36 in.); neck long; bill hooked at tip and usually slightly pointed upward while bird is swimming; feet webbed. Dark-colored both above and below.

13. FARALLON CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus albociliatus*). Length 30-36 inches. Black (brownish in immature plumage); *throat-pouch orange or yellow*; head with white plumes in summer.

14. BRANDT'S CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax penicillatus*). Size and color much as in the last species, but *throat-pouch blue surrounded by border of whitish feathers.*

15. BAIRD'S CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus resplendens*). Smaller (length 25-26 in.); bill more slender; adult plumage more iridescent; *throat-pouch small, dull red*; white patches on flanks in spring and early summer. Much less common than the last two species, its range being mainly to the northward.

BLACK-FOOTED ALBATROSS (29-36 inches)

ALBATROSSES (Family *Diomedeidae*)

Large oceanic birds, with long, narrow wings. Usually fly close to the surface of the water with much gliding and banking.

16. BLACK-FOOTED ALBATROSS (*Diomedea nigripes*). Generally called "gooney." Length 29-36 inches; *wingspread 7 feet.* Blackish above, sooty gray below; narrow, white area around base of blackish bill, and sometimes white at base of tail. Occasionally seen in channel between San Pedro and Santa Catalina Island, but much more common on open ocean outside the islands.

SOOTY SHEARWATER (16-18 inches)

SHEARWATERS AND FULMARS (Family *Procellariidae*)

Somewhat similar to gulls in appearance, but wings narrower, tail less fan-like, and nostrils in tube on top of bill. Fly close to water, flapping wings a few times then sailing. Obtain food by diving. Occur on the ocean, sometimes in large flocks. At times may be seen from shore, but do not come in to the beaches unless sick.

17. SOOTY SHEARWATER (*Puffinus griseus*). Often called "barracuda-bird." *Entire plumage dark sooty-gray*, except for white patches under wings; bill and feet blackish. Length 16-18 inches. Breeds in Southern Hemisphere during our winter season, and is common off our coast throughout most of the year.

18. PINK-FOOTED SHEARWATER (*Puffinus creatopus*). Slightly *larger* than last species, back more grayish and *underparts mostly white. Bill yellowish*, feet flesh color. Breeds on islands off coast of Chile; most plentiful off California during the summer.

PACIFIC FULMAR (17-19 inches)

19. BLACK-VENTED SHEARWATER (*Puffinus opisthomelas*). The *smallest* of our shearwaters (length 12-15 in.). Plumage almost exactly as in the Pink-footed Shearwater, but *bill bluish* and feet darker colored. Breeds on islands off the Mexican coast; common off southern California from late summer until the following spring.

20. PACIFIC FULMAR (*Fulmarus glacialis rodgersi*). Length 17-19 inches. Upper parts lighter colored than in any of the shearwaters, and *bill much stubbier*. Varies in plummage from all white, except for light gray back and black quills, to an all gray bird. *Bill yellow*. In the light plumage, much like a gull, but lacks black and white pattern at tip of wing, the bill is very different, and the flight is more like that of a shearwater or albatross. Irregularly common on the ocean in fall, winter and spring; frequently found dead on beaches. Summers in Artic regions.

BLACK PETREL (9 inches)

PETRELS (Family *Hydrobatidae*)

Small, slender, tern-like birds, with weak bill with nasal tubes elevated at the tip. Tail slightly forked; bill and feet black. Flit over the surface of the ocean with comparatively slow wing-beats.

21. BLACK PETREL (*Oceanodroma melania*). About 9 inches long. Upper parts sooty-black, with grayish-brown patch on wing; underparts sooty brown. Although several species of petrels have been recorded from off our coast, this is the only one that is at all common. It breeds on islands off the coast of Lower California, and is more or less plentiful on the ocean off our shores, but does not come to the beaches.

California Great Blue Heron (4 feet tall)

HERONS (Family *Ardeidae*)

Large, long-legged, long-necked wading birds with sharp bills. In flight, head drawn back to shoulders. Usually seen on marshes, but occasionally flying over ocean.

22. CALIFORNIA GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias hyperonca*). *Very large* (about 4 feet tall). *Coloration bluish-gray*, whiter about head and neck. Often erroneously called "crane."

23. AMERICAN EGRET (*Casmerodius albus egretta*). A *large* white heron, with *black feet* and legs and *yellow bill*.

24. BREWSTER'S SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula brewsteri*). A *smaller* white heron, with black legs, *yellow feet* and *black bill*.

25. BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON (*Nycticorax naevius hoactli*). About the size of the Snowy Egret (length 23-28 inches), but with shorter legs. Adults *black-capped*, light colored below; immatures brown, spotted and streaked with white.

SURF SCOTER (18-22 inches) (Male)

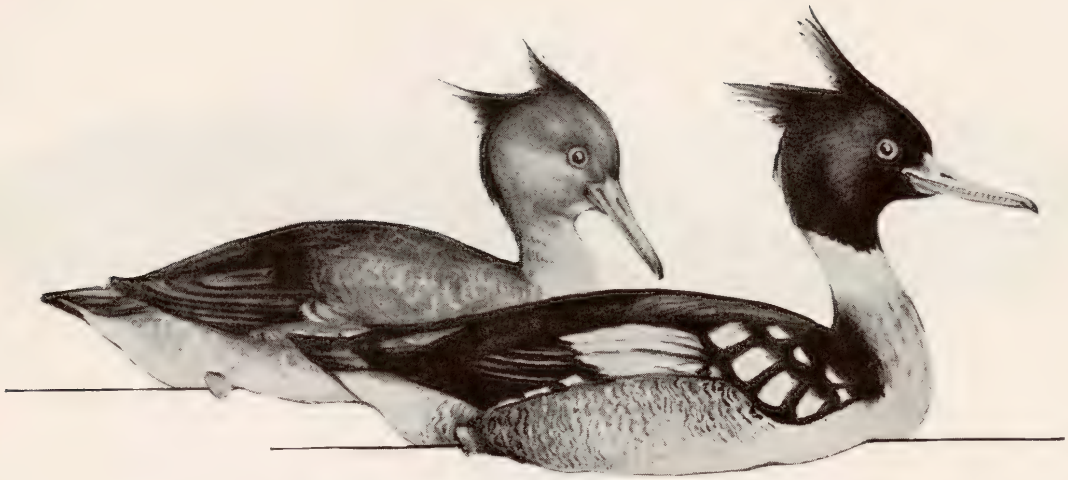
DUCKS AND GEESE (Family *Anatidae*)

Swimming birds, with short legs, fully webbed front toes, and tooth-like lamellae along cutting edges of bill. Mainly migratory. Geese are larger, heavier-bodied and longer-necked than ducks, and usually have a higher, narrower bill. The plumage is the same in both sexes in geese, but different in ducks.

26. LESSER SCAUP DUCK (*Nyroca affinis*). Often called "Blue-bill." A rather small diving duck (length 15-18 in.), with broad, white wing-stripe, often common in San Pedro and other bays, and less plentiful on open water. At a distance, the males appear to be "black at both ends and white in the middle." The females are brown, with a white area at the base of the bluish bill.

27. WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (*Melanitta deglandi*). A large, dark-colored sea duck (length 20-23 in.). Male black, with *white eye and wing patches*; female brown, with *white on wings* and sides of head.

28. SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*). Similar to the last, but slightly smaller and *lacks white on wings*. The scoters, sometimes called "coots," are common in bays and on the ocean from fall to spring and occasional in summer.



RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (20-25 inches)

29. RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*). (Saw-bill). A rather large, slender diving duck (20-25 inches long), with *narrow bill toothed along sides, crested head* and white wing patch. Head and crest black glossed with green in male, *light brown* in female; male with *brownish breast-band*.

30. AMERICAN MERGANSER (*Mergus americanus*). Slightly larger than the last, and much less common. Male with shorter crest, and *lacking brownish breast-band*. The females of the two are similar, but *americanus* has a *pronounced white throat-patch* and *darker brown* head and neck.

31. BLACK BRANT (*Branta nigricans*). A small goose (24-29 inches long). Dark brown, with black head, neck and breast, and *white collar* and under tail-coverts. Occasionally seen over the ocean in small flocks during migrations. May be distinguished from cormorants by white markings, shorter bill, larger wings and slower wing movements.

OSPREY (4½-6 feet wingspread)

HAWKS AND EAGLES (Family *Accipitridae*)

Broad-winged birds of prey.

32. BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). (American Eagle). A large eagle (wing-spread 6-7½ ft.), with *lower leg feathered only half-way down.* Adult with snowy white head and tail; immatures difficult to distinguish at a distance from the Golden Eagle, though the wing is somewhat narrower. The Bald Eagle, primarily a fish-eater, may be seen occasionally along shore, and a few pairs nest on Santa Catalina and San Clemente islands.

33. MARSH HAWK (*Circus hudsonius*). A slender hawk, 18-24 inches long, frequently seen flying over marshes. Adult males pale gray; females and immatures brown. *Large white patch on rump in both sexes.*

34. OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus carolinensis*). (Fish Hawk). A fairly large hawk (wing-spread 4½-6 ft.); *body blackish above, clear white below*; the only large hawk so patterned. Formerly fairly common along the coast, but now rare. A few still nest on the islands.

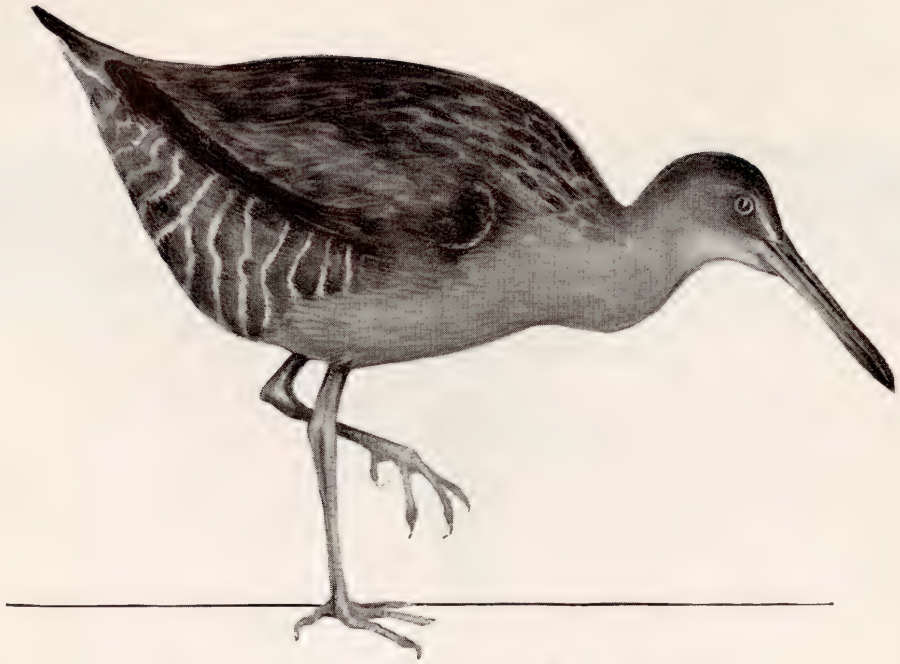
DUCK HAWK (about 3 feet wing-spread)

FALCONS (Family *Falconidae*)

Hawks with long, pointed wings and rapid wing-beats.

35. DUCK HAWK (*Falco peregrinus anatum*). A medium sized hawk (16-20 inches long); dark above and streaked or barred below, with *blackish "side-whiskers"* separated by white throat. Probably our fastest flying bird. Seen occasionally along shore, where it preys on water-fowl. A few nest on Santa Catalina and San Clemente islands.

36. SPARROW HAWK (*Falco sparverius*). Small (length 9-12 in.). Back rufous, barred with blackish (heavily in female, irregularly in male); shoulders and top of head brownish in female, bluish in male; lower parts streaked in female, spotted in male; *two black stripes on each cheek*. Our most common and generally distributed hawk. Feeds largely on grasshoppers, crickets and small rodents.



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CLAPPER RAIL (16 inches)

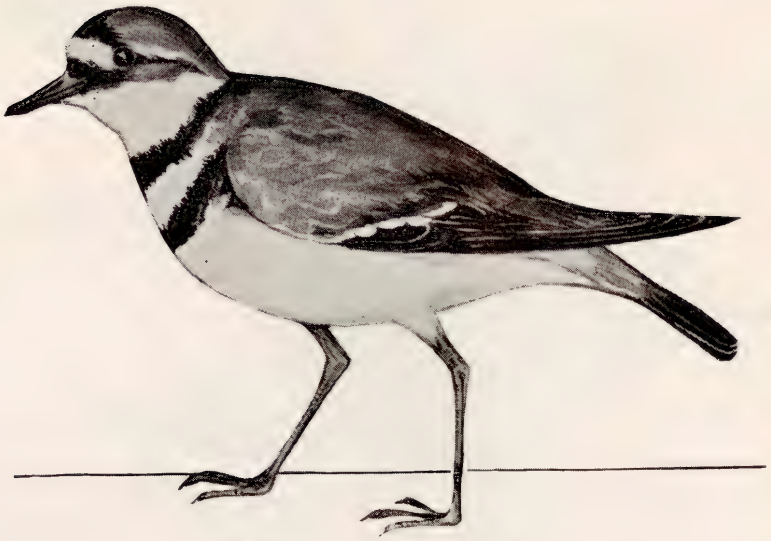
RAILS, COOTS AND GALLINULES (Family *Rallidae*)

Chicken-like marsh birds, of retiring habits (excepting the Coot). When flushed, they fly a short distance with *legs dangling*.

37. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CLAPPER RAIL (*Rallus obsoletus levipes*). (Light-footed Rail). The *largest* (length 16 in.) of the true rails (Sub-family *Rallinae*). Upper parts grayish-brown; chin white; lower throat and breast cinnamon (much faded in late summer). Bill 2¼-2½ inches long. Confined to salt marshes, where it lives among the grass and salicornia, only swimming when forced to do so by exceptionally high tides.

Several smaller species of rails occur in the salt marshes, but they are uncommon and secretive, hence seldom observed.

38. AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*). (Mud-hen). 13-16 inches long. Toes lobed along edges. Mostly gray, with blackish head and neck, and light-colored bill. *Jerky motion of head and neck while swimming.* Most common on fresh water, but occasionally visits the ocean and salt marshes.



KILLDEER (9-11 inches)

PLOVERS, TURNSTONES AND SURF-BIRDS (Family *Charadriidae*)

Rather stocky shore birds, with comparatively large head and short bill.

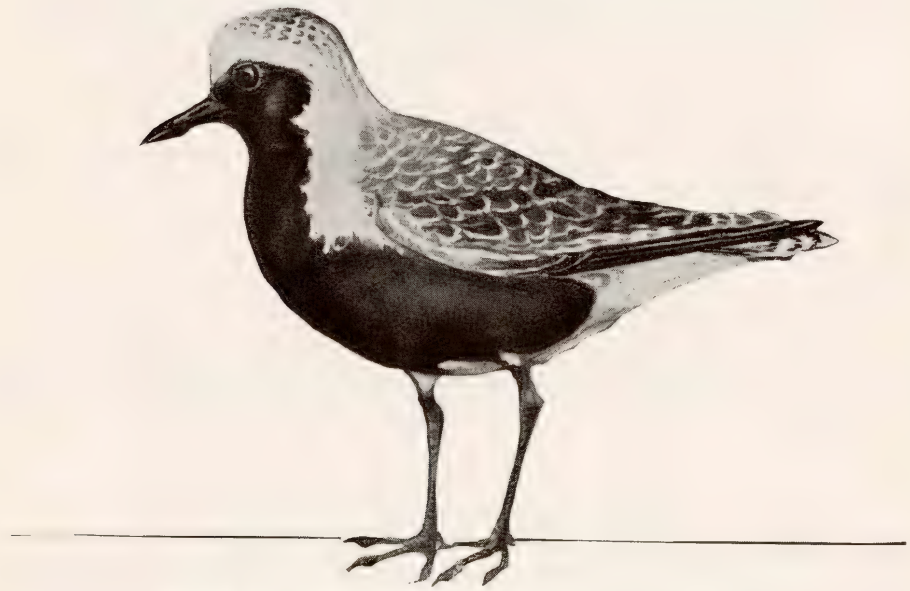
39. KILLDEER (*Oxyechus vociferus*). A large plover (length 9-11 inches), with *two black breast-bands* (the upper one the wider) and *reddish tail.* Most common around fresh water, but occasionally comes within the beach area.

40. SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*). Much smaller than the last (6½-7½ inches long), with upper parts dark brownish gray, and only *one dark breast-band.* Common migrant; less plentiful in winter; occasional in summer. Tide flats and beaches.

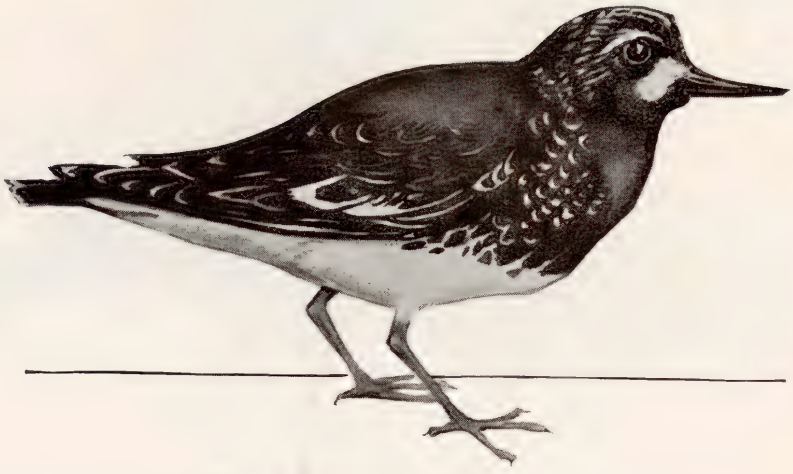
41. SNOWY PLOVER (*Charadrius nivosus*). But slightly smaller than last species. *Light gray above,* and *incomplete breast-band,* the latter reduced to a spot on each side of breast. Found along sandy beaches, generally above high-tide line.

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (10½-13 inches) (Winter)

42. BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Squatarola squatarola*). Largest of the local plovers (10½-13 inches long); stocky, with large head and short, thick bill. *Underparts black* in late spring and summer, white streaked with gray on chest in fall and winter. Best identification marks at latter time, *black patch under wing* and white above base of tail. Beaches and tide flats.



BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (10½-13 inches) (Summer)



BLACK TURNSTONE (8-9 inches)

43. BLACK TURNSTONE (*Arenaria melanocephala*). A rather squatty bird, 8-9 inches long, with *black head, neck and throat,* and brown legs. Occurs in small flocks along rocky shores in fall, winter and spring. When flushed gives a shrill rattling note, and in flight shows extensive white pattern on wings and lower back.

44. RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres morinella*). Much less plentiful than the last, but occurring in beach areas, as well as on rocks. May be distinguished by *white upper throat,* and white of lower parts penetrating gray of chest in a wedge; *legs orange.*

45. SURF-BIRD (*Aphriza virgata*). Slightly larger than the turnstones (10 inches long). Color grayish with white chin and abdomen, and white on upper parts confined to wings and tail; *legs yellowish.* Rare migrant, usually on rocks, but sometimes on beaches.

It is improbable that the casual visitor to our beaches will see any of the last three species, although they have been found along the rocky shore of the Palos Verdes and on the San Pedro breakwater. They are more common on the islands.

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (20-26 inches)

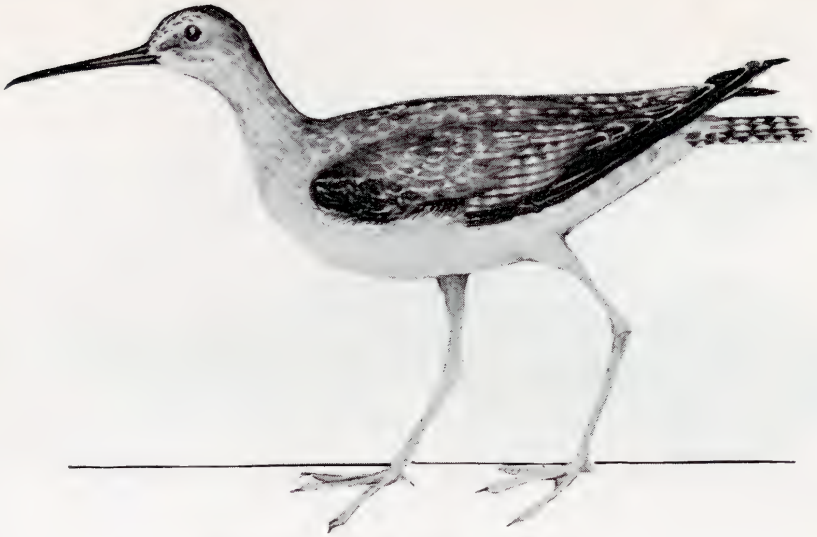
SNIPES, SANDPIPERS, ETC. (Family *Scolopacidae*)

Shore-birds, mostly dull-colored, with fairly long legs and bills, the latter used for probing in the sand or mud for food.

46. LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*). The curlews, common along shore from late summer to the following spring, may be easily recognized by their large size and long, down-curved bills. The Long-billed Curlew, the largest of the two species, is from 20 to 26 inches long, with bill usually from *5 to 8 inches* in length. It appears to be more attracted to tide-flats and higher parts of beaches.

47. HUDSONIAN CURLEW (*Phaeopus hudsonicus*). Smaller (length 15-18 in., bill 3-4 in.), with *striped head.* Commonest of the two curlews and one of the first northern birds to appear, the migration along our beaches starting early in July. A typical beach feeder, probing in the wet sand with its long bill.

48. MARBLED GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*). Another large shore-bird, similar in habits and appearance to the curlews, but easily distinguished by its *straight or slightly upturned bill.*



GREATER YELLOW-LEGS (13-15 inches)

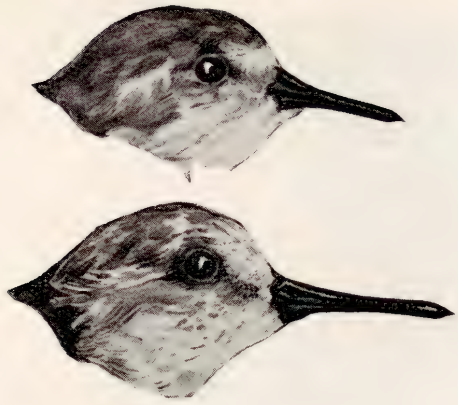
49. WESTERN WILLET (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus inornatus*). Often found in association with curlews and godwits, but quite different in appearance. It is slightly smaller (14-17 inches long), and, when standing, is a *gray bird with bluish legs.* In flight, however, it displays a very striking wing-pattern of *black and white.*

50. GREATER YELLOW-LEGS (*Totanus melanoleucus*). About the same length as the last species, but *much more slender.* A gray and white bird with long, *bright yellow legs,* and 2¼ inch bill.

51. LESSER YELLOW-LEGS (*Totanus flavipes*). Exactly like the last species, but much *smaller* (length 10-11 in., bill 1½ in.). Yellow-legs are mainly birds of fresh-water ponds and mud-flats, but they occasionally come to the beaches. The smaller species is rare locally.

52. DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*). A medium-sized shore-bird (length 11-13 in., bill 2-3 in.), usually seen in small flocks on tide-flats or fresh-water ponds. Best identification characters are the *long bill,* and *white lower back, rump and tail.*

53. RED-BACKED SANDPIPER (*Pelidna alpina sakhalina*). Smaller than the Dowitcher (8-9 inches long), with much shorter bill. In spring easily identified by *reddish back and black patch on belly.* More difficult in fall and winter, at which time back and breast are gray and belly white. The bill usually *curves downward* slightly near the tip.



LEAST SANDPIPER

WESTERN SANDPIPER

54. SANDERLING (*Crocethia alba*). 7-8½ inches long. In fall and winter the *lightest colored* of the sandpipers, but becomes more rusty colored in spring. A pronounced white wing-bar in all plumages. During the greater part of the year probably the most abundant shore-bird along the beaches, where it occurs in flocks, probing the wet sand, and retreating before and advancing with the surges.

55. WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Ereunetes mauri*). A small sandpiper (length 6-7 in.), with *partially webbed toes.* Back grayish in fall and winter, spotted with rufous and black in spring; underparts white, spotted with black on lower throat, breast and sides (spotting dim in fall and winter); *feet and legs black.*

56. LEAST SANDPIPER (*Pisobia minutilla*). Smallest of our sandpipers (length 5-6 in., bill ¾ in.), with *shorter, thinner bill* than the last species, and *yellowish or greenish feet and legs.* The plumage of the two is similar in color and, except under very favorable conditions, they are difficult to differentiate in the field. In the hand the Least is easily identified by its *unwebbed toes.*

57. WANDERING TATTLER (*Heteroscelus incanus*). 11 inches in length. Solid grayish above, with *white line over eye,* and *yellowish legs;* underparts white in fall and winter, narrowly barred with black in spring and summer. Usually solitary, and apparently confined to rocky shores.

58. SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularia*). 7-8 inches long. Olive-brown above and whitish below, lower parts spotted with black in summer. While standing or running, *the body bobs up and down* continually, and its flight is different from other shore-birds, the wing strokes being very short and *the wings maintaining a stiff, bowed appearance.* Found in the same situations as the Tattler.

NORTHERN PHALAROPE (6½-8 inches)

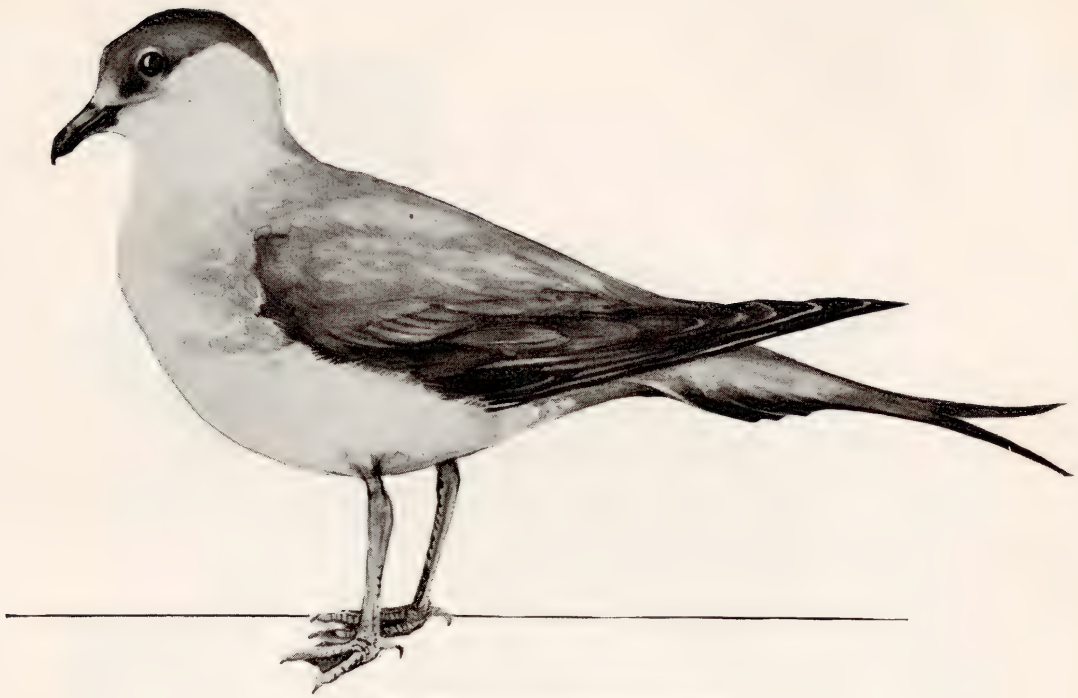
PHALAROPES (Family *Phalaropodidae*)

Frequently and appropriately called "swimming snipe." Body much like that of a sanderling; feet partially webbed, and toes margined along sides. Females larger and more brightly colored than males. Essentially swimming birds, but sometimes wade. When feeding on water, often spin like a top, presumably to roil the water and bring up small animal life.

59. RED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus fulicarius*). Length 7½ to 9 inches, bill less than 1 inch long, *wider and more flattened* than in next species. Under parts *dark red* in spring and summer; in fall and winter mostly *gray* on back and white below, with some black on back of head and neck and around eye. Migrant, mainly on open ocean, but occasional on sloughs and fresh water ponds. Fall migration lasts into December.

60. NORTHERN PHALAROPE (*Lobipes lobatus*). Smaller than last species (length 6½-8 in.); bill about same length, but *narrow and sharp-pointed*. Spring and summer, *dark red band around neck*; back black streaked with light red. Fall and winter, lower parts white except for gray on sides of breast; *back black with white and yellowish streaks;* black area around and behind eye bordered above by white stripe. Common migrant on both salt and fresh water.

61. WILSON'S PHALAROPE (*Steganopus tricolor*). Length 8½-10 inches; *bill thin, sharp-pointed, more than 1¼ inches long*. Spring and summer, throat cinnamon bordered by black and dark red; fall and winter, white below, grayish above. *No white wing bar* in any plumage. Occasional on lagoons during migrations, but much less common than last two species.



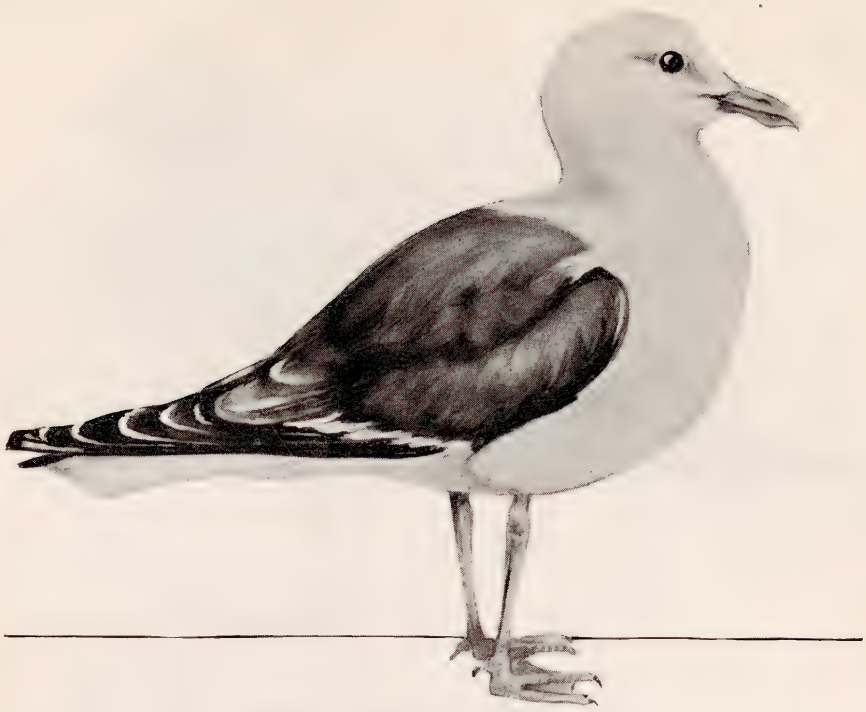
PARASITIC JAEGER (16-21 inches)

JAEGERS (Family *Stercorariidae*)

Hawk-like sea birds, with horny saddle (cere) across bill, white spot on wing at base of flight feathers, and elongation of two central tail feathers (latter character not always apparent in young birds). Obtain most of their food by robbing other birds, such as gulls, terns and shearwaters.

62. POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*). Largest of the genus (length 20-23 in.). Adult plumage in two phases, dark all over (rare), or dark on back, lower abdomen and tail, with white or yellowish collar, and white throat, breast and upper abdomen; *two central tail feathers elongated, twisted, blunt at ends.* Young birds more or less spotted and barred underneath and along sides, with incomplete collar, and central tail feathers less or not at all elongated. Occurs on the ocean during migrations, usually several miles off-shore.

63. PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). Body smaller than in last species. Adult plumage similar (2 phases), but *elongated central tail feathers pointed and not twisted; feet and legs black.* Immatures more or less spotted and barred with brown below; central tail feathers less or not at all elongated; legs and upper part of feet bluish. Rather common on the ocean during migrations and occasional in winter. Often seen from the San Pedro breakwater.



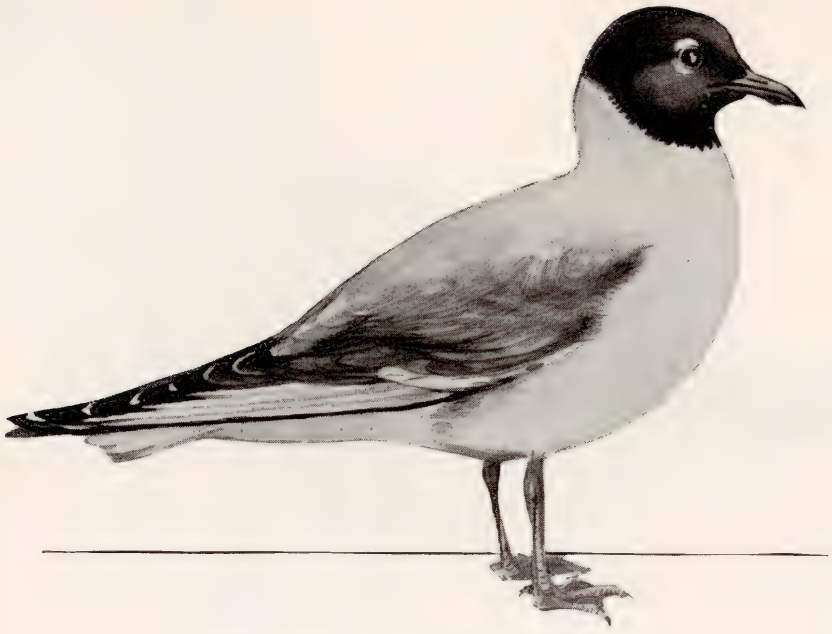
WESTERN GULL (24-27 inches)

64. LONG-TAILED JAEGER (*Stercorarius longicaudus*). Body slightly smaller than that of the preceding species, but, in adult plumage, *central tail feathers much longer* (sometimes extending 8 inches beyond rest of tail as compared to 4 or 5 inches in the Parasitic Jaeger). *Legs and upper part of feet bluish in all plumages.* Young birds of this and last species indistinguishable in the field. This is the rarest of the jaegers off southern California, having been certainly identified on very few occasions.

GULLS AND TERNS (Family *Laridae*)

GULLS (Subfamily *Larinae*)

Long-winged swimming birds with slightly hooked bill, webbed feet, and fine powers of flight. Mostly migratory. The majority of our gulls require several years, molting twice each year, to attain adult plumage. First year birds are dark and, as a rule, they become lighter colored each year until adult plumage is finally acquired. During various phases of immature plumage, particularly the early ones, the amateur observer will find it very difficult, if not impossible, to identify the species. With the exception of the Heermann's Gull, all our gulls with dark markings on the underparts or on the tail are immature; birds with pure white tails and breasts are adult. Identifying characters given below apply only to adult or near adult birds unless otherwise stated.



BONAPARTE'S GULL (12-14 inches)

65. GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus*). Large (length 26-32 in.); light gray back and upper wings; *ends of wings entirely white;* bill yellow with red spot below. A rare winter visitant from Alaska.

66. GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (*Larus glaucescens*). Similar to the last, but mantle (back and upper wings) slightly darker, and *wing tips light gray with white spots.* Rather common winter visitant along shore and on the ocean; occasional several miles inland. Some immatures of this species, in frayed plumage, have the gray worn off the wing quills to such an extent that they may be confused with young Glaucous Gulls.

67. HERRING GULL (*Larus argentatus*). Like the Glaucous-winged Gull, excepting for *black wing-tips with white spots. A* fairly common winter visitant from the interior.

68. WESTERN GULL (*Larus occidentalis*). Similar to the preceding, but *mantle very dark gray.* Bill yellow with red spot below, and feet and legs flesh-colored, as in Herring Gull. Our only resident gull. Nests on the Channel Islands, and seldom, if ever, leaves the coast.

69. CALIFORNIA GULL (*Larus californicus*). Slightly smaller (length 20-23 in.). Mantle bluish-gray, not as dark as in the last species; wing-tips black with white spots; bill yellow with *red and black spot* on lower mandible; *feet and legs greenish.* Breeds on lakes in the interior. Common along our coast and several miles inland from late September to early May.

70. RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*). Lighter on back than last species, and not quite as large (length 18-20 in.). Wing-tips black with white spots; feet and legs yellowish or yellow-green; *black ring around bill.* As in other species of this group, white head spotted with gray in winter. Common from September to May, along shore as well as inland. Particularly plentiful in San Pedro Harbor, less so on open ocean.

71. BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Larus philadelphia*). *Very small* for a gull (length 12-14 in.). *Bill black; feet and legs red;* mantle gray. Black head in spring, with white underparts, tail and zone across back of neck; in winter, head mostly white except for black ear-spots. Large, white wedge on *outer* part of wing; quills tipped with black. Immature birds lack the black head and have banded tails. Fairly common on both salt and fresh water from September to early May.

72. HEERMANN'S GULL (*Larus heermanni*). Medium-sized (18-21 inches long). Dark gray above, light gray below; head white in late winter and spring, "hooded" with sooty black in fall; wing quills and tail black, the latter tipped with white; inner wing feathers (secondaries) also white-tipped. Bill red with black tip; feet and legs black. Young birds entirely dark-colored, bill black. Breeds on islands off the Mexican coast and migrates north (!) in late summer to winter along our coast, remaining until March.

73. SABINE'S GULL (*Xema sabini*). About the size of Bonaparte's Gull. Bill black with *yellow tip;* feet and legs black. Outer part of wing mainly black, *inner part white*; *tail slightly forked.* Adult in summer and early fall, dark gray head with *narrow black collar* below; in late fall and winter, head mainly white. Young birds have mottled back and banded tail. Common during fall migration (late July to October), but mostly on ocean, seldom coming to shore. Apparently much less plentiful in spring.

TERNS (Subfamily *Sterninae*)

Long-winged, slender-bodied, fork-tailed water-birds of graceful flight. Most species breed around fresh water and spend remainder of year on or near coast. Food obtained from surface, or just below surface, of water, often by diving from the air. While in flight the sharp, slender bill is usually held pointed downward.

74. FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*). Length 14-15 inches (including 5-8 inch tail). Adults in spring and summer: white below; upper parts light pearl gray, top of head black; *outer web of outer tail feather white; outer wing feathers usually silvery;* feet orange-red; bill dull orange, dusky at tip. In winter: top of head white, back of head tinged with gray; dusky stripe around eye and across ears; bill and feet duller colored. Young similar to winter adults, but tail shorter and upper parts washed with brownish. Winter visitant, frequently remaining into early summer. Occurs along the coast, *usually close in-shore,* and in bays and lagoons. At a distance indistinguishable from the following species.

75. COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*). Similar to last species, but *outer web of outer tail feather dusky, outer wing feathers usually black.* Bill and feet of adults bright orange-red, bill tipped with black. Common migrant, *mostly over the ocean,* but occasionally coming in to the beach. Fall migration, August to October; spring migration, May.

76. LEAST TERN (*Sterna antillarum*). *Smallest* of the terns (length 8½-9½ in.), and the only one that breeds along our coast. Mantle pale gray; top and back of head black; outer wing feathers dusky; forehead, eye-stripe and under parts white; *bill and feet yellow.* Arrives from the south in April, nests on higher parts of sandy beaches (sometimes on dry mud-flats), and leaves mostly in September. Much less plentiful than formerly because of increasing invasion of its nesting grounds by humans, as well as by stray dogs and cats.

FORSTER'S TERN (14-15 inches)

77. ROYAL TERN(*Thalasseus maximus*). A *large* tern (length 18-21 in.); tail 6-8 inches long, forked for half its length; *crest of pointed feathers on back of head;* head and chest black in summer, mixed with white in winter; bill orange-red; feet black. Small flocks seen occasionally on the beaches or flying over the ocean.

78. BLACK TERN (*Chlidonias nigra surinamensis*). 9 to 10 inches long. In spring and summer *entirely dark colored* except for white lower tail coverts; in fall head and underparts white. Occurs during migrations, both on the ocean and around sloughs, ponds and lakes.

BELTED KINGFISHER (11-14 inches)

Miscellaneous land birds that are either confined to the seacoast or are best known as members of the coastal avifauna:

KINGFISHERS (Family *Alcedinidae*)

79. BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon caurina*). A large-headed, crested, short-legged bird, 11 to 14 inches in length, with long, sharp bill. Upper parts and broad breast-band bluish gray; collar white; sides and flanks bluish gray in male, rufous in female, the rufous on the sides of the latter often meeting to form a band across the belly; lower side of tail gray, narrowly barred with white; rest of underparts white. The loud, rattling note of this bird and its manner of plunging into the water for its food are both characteristic.

AMERICAN RAVEN (21-26 inches)

JAYS, CROWS, AND RAVENS (Family *Corvidae*)

80. AMERICAN RAVEN (*Corvus corax sinuatus*). Much larger than a crow (length 21-26 in.), with stouter head and beak. Black, glossed with purplish in adult plumage; *feathers of throat pointed*; tail wedge-shaped. In flight, often *alternates flapping with soaring*; note, a croak, rather than a caw. Seen occasionally along the mainland shore; abundant on the islands, where it nests on cliffs. As it relishes eggs, it is a persistent raider of the island sea-bird colonies.

DUSKY WARBLER (4½-5 inches)

WOOD WARBLERS (Family *Compsothlypidae*)

81. DUSKY WARBLER (*Vermivora celata sordida*). An inconspicuous little bird (length 4½-5 in.) of the Wood Warbler family. Bill slender, pointed, slightly less than ½ inch long. Upper parts dull greenish-drab, a little brighter green at base of tail; *pale yellow ring around eye*; concealed crown patch of dull orange in adults; underparts greenish yellow, throat indistinctly streaked with darker, and center of abdomen light yellow or yellowish white; outer wing feathers and tail dull brown; *no wing bars*. Common resident of the Channel Islands and the coastal slope of the Palos Verdes Hills; more generally distributed in winter. Usually seen flitting about in low bushes. Insectivorous.

BELDING'S SPARROW (5 inches)

FINCHES AND SPARROWS (Family *Fringillidae*)

82. BELDING'S SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis beldingi*). A rather small sparrow (about 5 inches long), with fairly heavy bill. Upper parts brown, streaked with blackish (most broadly on back); no distinct crown stripe. Below white, buffy on sides, *heavily streaked with blackish*, particularly on breast and sides. An abundant resident of the salt marshes.

83. LARGE-BILLED SPARROW (*Passerculus rostratus*). Similar to the last species, but slightly larger (about 5½ inches long), with larger, lighter colored bill that is *regularly curved for its entire length*. Upper parts grayish-brown, *indistinctly* streaked with darker; under parts white, streaked with *sandy brown*. Common winter visitant, mingling with the last species in salt marshes, also often seen around docks, lumber-yards and other similar places. It comes up from Lower California in the fall, and in spring returns there to nest.

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